

Adventures in Gardening

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Hops

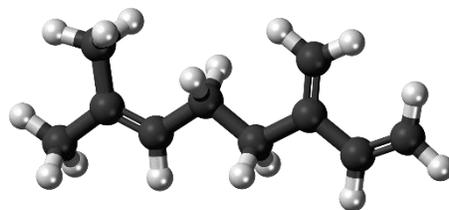
Hops are a wicked and pernicious weed. – Henry VIII of England

Hops are easy to grow. They are vines and prefer to grow vertically. If you like their aroma – well then, they smell amazing. If you brew your own beer – they are an



essential ingredient. I grow them up and along a fence. When the hops are ready to harvest, they look like green pinecones made of paper. They are very light.

Hops come in many [varieties and flavors](#). They are as unique as wine or coffee varieties.



Myrcene is responsible for their pungent aroma. Other essential oils add to this effect. The bitter taste of beer is from acids in the hops.

To grow hops you just need to buy rhizomes, plant them and add a bit of water. They grow like weeds – and once you begin to grow them, they come back every year bigger and bushier.

If you decide you would like to use hops to make beer – the first step is to harvest them.

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Just pick the cone. If you don't plan to use the hops immediately you will need to dry them, vacuum seal them, and freeze them. If they oxidize (are exposed to air) they will quickly lose their flavor.



I use a dehydrator which is basically a temperature controlled environment where a fan gently blows. I set it to the lowest heat – around 120°F – lower than most ovens can maintain – and wait until they are dry (about a day). Then I vacuum seal them and toss them in the freezer where they will keep for a couple of years.

To use them in beer you can grind them to a powder like consistency. An IPA beer uses about 10 grams of hops per liter – ales use less, double IPAs use more. The amount of hops in a beer is roughly correlated with its bitterness. (Of course, the amount of sugars added affects this too.)

The first documented use of hops in beer is from the 9th century.

So why did Henry VIII think they were wicked? Apparently, he believed they were an aphrodisiac and he believed they would incite lustful, sinful behavior. Perhaps he preferred sweet beers. But for the gardener there is another reason why hops are pernicious and wicked.

Look at this image:



These are the stems of the vines and the vines are always searching for something to grab on to so they can continue to grow. These vines will reach out to you as you go by – waving in the wind and maybe delivering a little scratch if you get too close.

Nevertheless, I grow them because I do enjoy their aroma and perhaps, I admire their pernicious wickedness 😊

References

https://www.morebeer.com/articles/homebrew_beer_hops